

*TRANSPLANTED*

A VIDEO GAME

A CREATIVE PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

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MASTER OF FINE ARTS

BY

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## **Abstract**

For this Creative Project I have created a stop-motion video game. The game is compiled using the Unity game engine, and all assets are created by hand. The narrative of the game is about a young girl who moves to a new home after graduating from college. She quickly develops depression and never finishes unpacking her boxes. After a year has passed, she receives a mysterious plant in the mail. She begins taking care of the plant, and in turn, the plant helps to motivate her to take care of herself and start unpacking all her literal baggage. The character will unpack four rooms, each aligning with a stage in the Transtheoretical Model of change.

The game mechanics are simple, with a focus on accessibility to an audience that may not be familiar with many video games. The goal of this project is to create a video game that is visually unique, while also serving as a conduit for empowerment through learning how to elicit change on a personal, internal level. I am combining the media of stop-motion animation, visual story-telling, and video game development in order to create a playable game. My goal is that this project helps to elevate the medium of video games and animation into the sphere of fine art.

This Creative Project is a collaborative effort where I have worked with Emily Thornton, a fellow graduate student. In working together, we have been allowed the ability to work on a much larger scope. While working together we have also learned critical communicative and group working skills that relate to the standards of traditional video game and animation industries.

## Statement of the Problem

Within the last one-hundred years, animation has crept into the pantheon of Fine Art as well as commercial media. With the appearance of programming blocks like Adult Swim and shows like *Family Guy*, animation has developed more adult tastes and more nuanced story telling devices. On a shorter time frame, the same can be said for video games. But what does it take for a video game to pass over from passive entertainment to a complex, audience-driven journey? What differentiates Saturday morning cartoons from the films of Don Hertzfeldt or William Kentridge? What does it take for a viewer to recontextualize how they view film, animation, and video games? Can a video game be a catalyst for personal growth and change? I explore these issues in my Creative Project.

Emily Thornton, a fellow animation graduate student and game developer, and I are creating a stop-motion video game for our Creative Project. We are creating film sets and props, photographing real-life constructed scenes, animating characters, importing photos into a video game creation software (the Unity game engine), writing computer programs and scripts, and finally compiling all this information into a playable video game. The goal of this project is to create a video game that subverts the expectations of its medium and shows the wide breadth of expression that can come from video games.

Narratively, the game follows a young girl who has just moved after graduating college. Upon moving in to her new home, she develops depression, losing all motivation to unpack and clean her house. A year after moving in, she receives a plant at her front door. In learning to take care of this plant, the girl works up the motivation to start taking care of herself. She begins unpacking old boxes, pulling herself out of her depression while doing so.

While the action within the game is somewhat benign, the premise goes beyond simple gameplay mechanics. The character cleans four rooms throughout the game; each room represents one stage of the Transtheoretical Model of Change. While the character is cleaning boxes and old baggage out of her home, literal cleaning will represent a placeholder for any internal baggage that the audience may have. The hope is for the player to walk away from the game feeling as if they can make personal changes in their own lives.

Video games have been aligned towards fine art for some time now. Games such as *Journey*, *Ico*, and *Shadow of the Colossus* straddle the line between mild entertainment and visual art. These games push the boundary of video games by removing many of the traditional video game elements: tutorials, coins, health points, and maps. In exchange, these games rely on the player to test the waters and experience the game on their own accord, along with a sense of untethered freedom. Atmosphere is created in the digital landscapes, but also through emotionally charged spaces that parallel what the player character is internally experiencing. In *Shadow of the Colossus*, the game consists of large rolling plains, and winding mountain trails that lead to tough enemies. These landscapes foreshadow what the player will be facing and create tension, similar to the building of anticipation that music creates in horror movies. By doing away with traditional interfaces and giving the player freedom, the player becomes immersed in these game spaces both digitally and emotionally.

Many of the games previously mentioned create vast spaces, whether physically or emotionally, in which the player is completely immersed. In *Journey*, the player is tasked with guiding a non-descript character towards the top of a mountain. Through the

journey, this character traverses multiple landscapes, dodging obstacles and aggressive creatures. The expected play-time is relatively short, but leaves an existential void when the game is over. At one point towards the end, the character is walking forward in a blizzard, assuming they are going in the direction of their destination. For some time the player is only holding a joystick in one direction, no enemies or obstructions are in the way. Visually, there is only snow, mechanically there is only one button being pressed. However, through the emotional landscape rather than the physical, the game places the player in a strange, new space. This use of literal and emotional landscape in order to facilitate change and response is what I am creating in *Transplanted*; while the character never leaves her home, there is an emotional change and growth that occurs internally.

Typically, most game environments use 3D modeling software to create involved, detailed worlds. Even with 2D games, such as the original *Super Mario Bros*, computer graphics are utilized in creating backgrounds and objects. Instead of computer created graphics, I am working in the mode of stop-motion in order to create video game assets. While the number of games that straddle the line of art and entertainment are growing, the use of stop-motion in game design is still relatively novel.

Stop-motion is used in a few video games, *Armikrogg* and *Harold Halibut* to name two, but is rarely seen in most commercial games. It is primarily reserved for films and television, and most of the medium is used in small scale, artistic, and experimental endeavors. The aesthetic of stop-motion is so far removed from traditional 2D or 3D computer animation because it has a unique textural appeal due to the hand crafted nature of sets, props, and characters. In the stop-motion animated series *Wallace and Gromit*, fingerprints can occasionally be seen on characters and objects in the background. Instead of being a distraction to the audience, these small details



create an endearing appreciation and character solely inherent within stop-motion. These elements create a personal, visceral connection with the viewer by revealing the seams of the work and allowing the audience a candid look at ‘behind the scenes.’ I am interested in how this aesthetic honesty creates a unique space for the player in which to be immersed, the same players can be lost in the seamless environments of *Ico* and *Shadow of the Colossus*.

Just as these games help broaden the depth and conceptual potency of video games, I am recontextualizing how video games are viewed, particularly related to fine art. I am very interested in how video games can be used to communicate concepts and cathartic experience through interaction and empathy for characters. Whether done so through strong narrative structure, emotionally atmospheric scapes, or engaging environments, video games can take the player beyond the expected tedium of button-pressing and into the realm of mindful thinking. “Transplanted” is intended to blur lines between the crafting of sculptural art, aesthetically honest animation, and interactive experience.

Subverting the viewer’s understanding of games through the charming and appealing nature of stop-motion is the perfect vehicle for delivering concepts and philosophy within a work of art. By making the visual elements easily digestible, I am broadening the expected audience and making the game more enjoyable for any viewer, even one with no art or video game knowledge. This is the same way humor and subversion is used by many contemporary artists.

I am interested in doing for video games what Roy Lichtenstein did for comic books and Wayne White did for landscape paintings; bringing video games into the contemporary art lexicon and allowing them to be considered as a medium for art creation. Roy Lichtenstein created large scale comic book paintings during the post-WWII Pop-Art movement. He took panels and frames from comic books, enlarged them in order to show the dot matrix of printing, and altered the text. Lichtenstein was trying to recontextualize the cultural importance of comic books and other seemingly benign content; the same way Andy Warhol raised the cultural value of Campbell's soup. By doing so, Lichtenstein not only changed how the world viewed art, but also how the world views comic books. When Wayne White creates his Word Paintings, he takes found, thrift store landscape images and paints his own words and phrases within the portrayed landscapes. His words and phrases exist within the paintings; they are not just a flat layer of paint over top of an image. Painted texts weave between buildings, trees, people, and other facets of the landscape. In doing so, he is actively abiding by the laws of the paintings and inserting his own ideas *into* the realm of the found object. White uses a subversive mode of humor that helps to recontextualize these discarded and dated landscape paintings. By doing so, he revitalizes these images and places them back into the modern day sphere of art.

## **Review of Influences and Literature**

My influences range from seemingly innocuous influences as a child, to more explicit artistic influences as an adult that speak to the themes of identity and family, embracing the mundane, and attempting to appeal to a personal connection opposed to mass appeal. Throughout my works in the past, humor has been a monumental contributor. While all of my influences have led to the creation of this Creative Project, not all of them have had a visible effect on it. I will be noting which influences have impacted the creation of *Transplanted*.

### **Magical Realism in animation**

I have always been drawn to animated cartoons. While children's shows like *Rocko's Modern Life* and *Rugrats* were a significant visual aesthetic, it was shows with more serious content that really caught my attention. *The Simpsons*, *South Park*, and later *Family Guy* really left a lasting impact. It was not strictly due to their thematic content or adult situations, it was more about the situations that the characters were thrust into and how these animated characters lived in a believable environment that also played host to countless bizarre and unexpected events.

In “‘Oh Yeah!’: Family Guy as Magical Realism?”, an article written by Alison Crawford, the author speaks to the aspects of *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* that introduce contemporary and cultural critique through the use of animation.<sup>1</sup> As opposed to the repeated, cycling backgrounds of Fred Flintstone, when Homer Simpson runs for a period of time he will eventually hit a wall. When Peter Griffin gets into a fight he comes out with cuts, scrapes, and bruises, unlike Daffy Duck when shot by Elmer Fudd. While the protagonists of *South Park* are

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<sup>1</sup> Crawford, Alison “‘Oh yeah!’: Family Guy as Magical Realism?” *Journal of Film and Video* 61, no. 2 (2009) 52-69.

all elementary school boys, they often find themselves in larger than life situations involving giant guinea pigs and building a literal ladder to heaven. These shows present realistic environments and use magical realism to parody and satire contemporary issues, much the same as *Saturday Night Live*.

While *SNL* is anchored in reality with live action actors, animated cartoons are allowed the freedom to portray literally anything. Characters can sprout wings and fly away or be crushed by a piano and wake up with only a bump on the head. However, it is a commitment to staying grounded in realism that makes the magical elements in *The Simpsons* or *Family Guy* so jarring and satirical.

In her article, Crawford gives an example of magical realism from the first episode of *Family Guy*. While in court, Peter Griffin is awaiting a verdict of welfare fraud. The judge finds Peter guilty and one after the other, Peter's family yell, "Oh no!"



Figure 1

After the third shout, the Kool-Aid man busts through a wall in the courtroom and screams, "Oh yeah!", a reference to Kool-Aid commercials and pop culture [Fig. 1]. There is a moment of silence, and the Kool-Aid man slowly backs up and leaves the courtroom while the show continues forward. Crawford writes,

I recall watching this episode around the turn of the millennium and finding the appearance of this intruder startling, as it disrupted the narrative so violently. It left me feeling bemused. The episode offers no explanation for this sudden incursion and hardly any time to dwell on it because as soon as the invading

creature exits the scene, the episode continues apace, forcing the viewer to move on with the renewed flow of narrative.<sup>2</sup>

Here, Crawford begins to describe the use of magical realism within animation. While *The Simpsons* set the groundwork for realism in animation, taking many cues not from animation, but live action sitcoms, it was *Family Guy* that cemented this approach in pop culture. Both these animated series were reactions to contemporary sitcoms at the time that were starting to question and satirize the traditional format of serial television. “In middle-class, conservative sitcoms of the 1950s and 60s, such as *Father Knows Best*, *The Partidge Family*, and *Happy Days*, and in more recent sitcoms such as *The Cosby Show*, *Home Improvement*, and *Everybody Loves Raymond*, wider social or economic problems do not tend to intrude.”<sup>3</sup> Here, Crawford touches on the change from nonobtrusive sitcoms to shows like *All in the Family* and *The Honeymooners*, where “...often the humor is bleak, and there is real conflict among family members.”<sup>4</sup> The same way these shows shed light on more unsavory themes, animation is able to exist outside the realm of reality in order to make a more poignant argument.

This magic realism has become more mainstream in pop culture, animation, and live-action TV shows. Often using humor, magical realism can be a tool that helps implement nuanced views on social or cultural content that is easily digestible for a viewer. I am interested in expanding this concept into the realm of video game design, in order to communicate themes to the player.

### **Marcel Duchamp, Yves Klein, and the value of Art**

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

One of the most influential artists to me is Marcel Duchamp; from his contributions to the Cubist and Futurist movements with *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, to his later works with found objects such as *Bicycle Wheel* and *L.H.O.O.Q.* [Fig. 3]. His work with found objects and appropriation has always had a monumental influence on my own perception on art. In 1946, Merrie Melodies released the cartoon *Daffy Doodles* [Fig. 2]. In this short, Daffy Duck is portrayed as a maniacal ‘demon’ who draws mustaches over faces in ads, newspapers, and statues. For some reason, this animated short always stuck with me. From that point on, I always was amused by drawing mustaches and goatees on peoples’ faces in books and newspapers. Whether the creator of the animation intended to reference Marcel Duchamp or not is irrelevant. The seed had been planted, and years

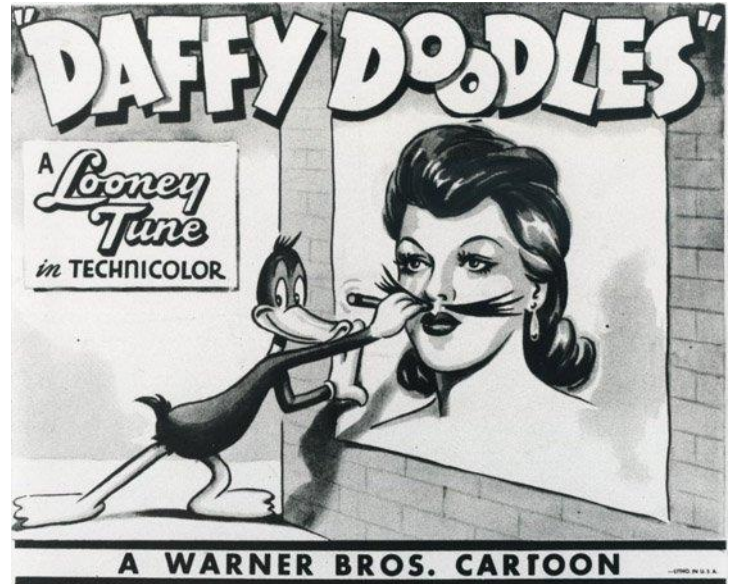


Figure 2

later it would be groomed into an art degree. In the meantime, I would draw missing teeth, mustaches, eye patches, and other appendages and fashion statements across any form of paper material I was given, it was almost a knee-jerk reaction. However, Duchamp’s approach to Mona Lisa on a postcard goes far beyond simple parody, and his intentions are far from shallow.

While Duchamp used humor to facilitate understanding, that was far from his only tool of communication. He turned the art world upside down in order to have a better understanding of how art is valued and what it means to be art in a larger scope. For his ready-made work *Fountain*, Duchamp repurposed a urinal and called it art.



Figure 3

However, the meaning and importance of the piece still echoes throughout contemporary art. The work begs the question of what is art, how do we place value on art, and who is in charge of claiming value? Two years after showing *The Fountain*, Marcel created *L.H.O.O.Q.* by taking a postcard of the Mona Lisa, drawing a mustache and goatee, and adding the title, L.H.O.O.Q., at the bottom.<sup>5</sup>

Duchamp was not merely parodying the *Mona Lisa*, he was also commenting on the legacy of the painting as an object and the commercialization of it. A postcard is something



simple, easy, and digestible that can be purchased for relatively cheap and typically bought for the exact purpose of dissemination. By using a postcard as his medium of subversion, Duchamp not only adds commentary to the original painting of the *Mona Lisa*, but also the mode of commerce and the ready-made qualities of the product. He calls into question the mode through which Art is presented, and how a work's meaning can be re-evaluated through contemporary metrics.

Figure 4

This is what I am attempting to do within the context of a video game. With the use of stop motion, the game is viewed in a more artistic and experimental context rather than a traditional video game format. Changing expectations regarding art and its inherent value has always been a topic for conversation, as even after Duchamp the conversation continued.

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<sup>5</sup> In French, when these letters are spoken out loud they sound like “elle a chaud au cul.” This translates to “She has a hot ass.”

I remember hearing about Yves Klein while in an art history class as an undergrad. In his body of work titled *Zone de Sensibilite Picturale Immatérielle* (Zone of Immaterial pictorial sensibility) [Fig. 5], Klein sets out to further explore how art is valued and consumed. Klein investigated the rituals involved in the art world that are created through the buying and selling of works of art. Klein sold these invisible paintings for twenty grams of gold leaf and would have the buyer meet him at the Seine River in Paris, with an art critic on hand. He then took the gold, usually provided in gold leaf, and gave the buyer a receipt and the transaction was complete. Klein also offered the buyer another option. To fully complete the ‘ritual’ Klein would offer to throw half the gold leaf into the river if the buyer burned their receipt, completing purchase of the immaterial. For Klein it was not about taking money for a product. He was far more interested in the singular, personal investment and interest of the individual.



In this respect, I too am more interested in creating works that connect with the audience on a singular, **Figure 5** individual level opposed to general acceptance. Every individual takes something different from a piece of art. For Klein, the perfect way of showing this is through invisible paintings where the buyer and audience can imply their own thoughts and ideas. For me, I am creating a video game where the player can insert themselves into the character’s situation and use the game play as a form of meditative consideration. While the video game narrative may be a little more linear than Klein’s work, the conceptual personal connection is strong within the character’s in-game interactions. Just as Klein was creating an invisible painting for his buyers to imply their own



narrative, I want to give the viewer a character who is a vessel for personal reflection and understanding.

### **Matthew Crawford, Howard Fulcher, Memes and Process as Product/Commodity**

My dad worked construction for most of his life and knows how to fix some things. In his mid-seventies now, he repairs and restores tractors for a hobby. Whenever I go home, I inevitably end up in his shop, watching him tear something down, or build it back up. There is always at least one project going at any given moment. In recent years, I have begun to appreciate it even more; there is something satisfying about fixing a leaking gasket, or replacing a cracked piston with your own hand.

I do not work on tractors. As much as I would love to, I probably never will, but I do like working in the physical realm. There is a tactile, satisfying nature to working with your hands that has its own gratification. This sort of satisfaction is apparent in Matthew Crawford's *Shop Class as Soulcraft*. Crawford states about working as an electrician in Santa Barbara after not getting a job after college:

I never ceased to take pleasure in the moment, at the end of a job, when I would flip the switch. 'And there was light.' It was an experience of agency and competence. The effects of my work were visible for all to see, so my competence was real for others as well; it had a social currency.<sup>6</sup>

Here, Crawford talks about the tactility of physical work and the satisfaction of finding a solution to a problem. In game development and animation, there are few opportunities to work with physical materials. Game development can be mocked up with paper and pencil, but much of the mechanics and prototyping are done on a computer, through a game engine. While animations are still created with paper and drawing utensils, most commercial animated works are created

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<sup>6</sup>Crawford, Matthew. *Shop Class as Soulcraft*. (New York; The Penguin Press, 2009), 14.

digitally. In both cases, the majority of the time there is an intermediary working, typically a computer program or software interface, between the touch of the human hand and the finished product. However, with stop-motion animation, that is not the case.

Working with computer software may not allow for easy and innovative solutions, but in becoming your own mechanic and working physically, there is a personal connection with the labor of creating. There is a directness lost in working digitally, as well as a tacit physicality that no longer exists within the digital realm. With stop-motion, artifacts can reveal themselves in the finished project that were unintended such as thumbprints, stains, or traces of the human touch. Though some approaches to animating regard these artifacts as unwanted, they help to breathe life into the works and environments.

With stop-motion being the vehicle for our video game, we are not simply relaying on narrative or mechanics to push the player through the video game landscape. Hand-crafted details can be seen in the background and foreground, calling for the viewer to take their time through these spaces and take note of small, minute details. That is part of the goal for this project, to create a video game that calls on the player to slow down and not look at the game as a goal based experience, but rather a deliberate and meditative space that can be slowly explored and unboxed.

### **Video Games as Meditative Space for Change**

While video games can be extremely complex, some developers attempt to distill a game to its basic functions and concepts in order for a more streamlined approach. Games such as the *Katamari Damcy* series and *Journey* approach

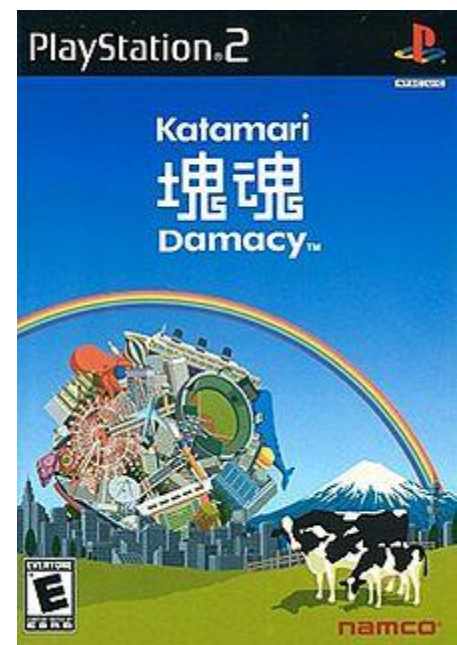


Figure 6

simplicity in different ways, but still maintain ethereal qualities that are rare in other games.

*Katamari Damacy* is a Japanese video game that originally released in 2004 on the Playstation 2 [Fig. 6] game system. In *Katamari*, the player controls the Prince of the Cosmos and is enlisted by his father, the King of the Cosmos, to go to Earth and make stars by rolling things up into a ball on Earth. The premise is absolutely absurd, but the gameplay is simple: roll around a sticky ball and collect things till your ball is a specified size. In every level there is a time limit, and sometimes the player is prompted to collect specific items, but the concept is all the same: roll a ball. After beating the game, you unlock the option to have no timer, you can roll as long as you want with no rush or reason. Even with a timer, the process of rolling becomes secondary shortly after learning how to play. The controls are intuitive, and the game quickly becomes a cascading landscape of countless objects rolled into an ever consuming mass. While there is no shortage of visual stimuli, the experience evolves from the physical and the controls become automatic. At points there is a conscious rush, but often the game allows ample time for the player to explore and collect objects. The game becomes an area for the player to unpack their grievances and roll them up into a ball, throwing them into the cosmos when they are done. This simplicity that *Katamari Damacy* maintains through the entire experience of game play is what I am creating through the game mechanics of *Transplanted*. Though our video game is different than rolling a ball, there are simple mechanics and basic tasks that are intended to transcend beyond unassuming button .

The idea of video games being a place of release is no new idea, but some games do push the concept in varying directions. Many games are hailed as therapeutic and sighted as a release from the real world. However, some games push the boundaries of defining what it means to be a video game. Games such as *Shadow of the Colossus*, *Ico*, and *Journey* pay tribute to a more

existential experience. The stories and narratives in these games are implied at best, and illustrate a story that requires the player to infer their own assumptions. While puzzles exist, they are only secondary to the overall treatment of the interactive experience. Games like *Journey* and *Shadow of the Colossus* create atmosphere and catharsis that blur the lines of art and entertainment.

In *Journey* [Figure 7], the player is tasked with guiding a nondescript character on a pilgrimage to the top of a mountain. There are elements common in many video games, but the overall feel is much more meditative. Focusing on the act of traveling rather than the final destination, the ending of



Figure 7

the game is cited as a sordid religious experience, leaving some in tears, and others in awe.<sup>7</sup>

While being such an influential game, the mechanics and game play are very simple.

*Journey* offers little in terms of a typical gameplay experience; for instance, while the game contains enemy figures, the player has no weapons, and the focus is not on combat. This, the game stands in a line of several recently popular indie adventure games (such as *Dear Esther*, *The Stanley Parable*, or *Gone Home*) in which the player does little more than walk through an environmental story, told through elements in the game world. The sand-covered ruins players encounter in *Journey*, for instance, hint at an ancient civilization, but the game never reveals the backstory. Some commentators have argued that a game like *Journey* actually cannot be considered a game at all—for example, because there is no competition or fail state (cf. Stuart). Yet the game offers numerous gaming features: its presentation from the start fits neatly into a third-person adventure genre; hidden items are scattered throughout the world, which the player can collect; and there are puzzles to be solved.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Tom Van Nuenen. "Procedural Emotion: *Journey* as Emerging Pilgrimage" *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 2016. 466-491.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 469.

*Journey*'s emotional potency comes not from sophisticated computer graphics or a robust artificial-intelligence, but rather from the atmospheric and emotionally charged landscapes. While implications may exist, there is no explanation for the ruins and relics that dot the landscape the player traverses. History is not explained, but rather builds as the player progresses on their pilgrimage. What is experienced, is individual to the pilgrim and creates a new sentimentality within the player's personal journey. The culmination of the video game is what explodes into cathartic revelry for some and tears of joy for others.

While *Transplanted* is intended to be a meditative place for the player, it is not void of narrative content and structure. Elaine must eventually clean four rooms of her home; her bedroom, bathroom, living room, and then kitchen. These rooms relate to the four primary stages of the Transtheoretical Model of Change. Contemplation is the first stage and is represented through the initial cleaning of the bedroom. Preparation is the second stage of change and relates to cleaning the bathroom and Elaine taking a shower. Action and then Maintenance are the final two phases and are represented through the cleaning of the living room and kitchen respectively. Following Elaine through these stages is intended to be a slow and meaningful gameplay experience that can be enlightening for the viewer.

## Descriptions and Images of the Artwork

There is only to be one definitive piece of work, the *Transplanted* video game. However, with full access to a gallery, we will be able to exhibit objects and artifacts from the creation process. As we have created a video game through stop-motion animation, there will be a copious number of displayable objects: sets, puppets, props, and backgrounds [Fig.8]. Displaying these objects in correlation to having playable versions of the game for the audience to try out will be pivotal to the display and reception of the game.

When the viewer first walks in the gallery, they will be greeted with computer stations in the center of the space. Viewers will be invited to become participants and start a new game. The introductory menu of *Transplanted* will offer players the option to start a new game. Once the player has started the game, there will be a small introductory cutscene, and then the player will begin to control the character. The game is intended to be ten to fifteen minutes in length, short enough to play in one sitting.

In making the game so short, the goal is to make the game accessible and easy for anyone to pick up, play, and experience. This time may seem brief for a video game but is a time frame I would expect any viewer to take to experience a piece of work in a gallery. The game will



Figure 8

not be able to be saved, speaking to the brevity and ephemeral nature to experiencing art. There is no save station or checkpoint when viewing art.

Through the actual gameplay, the player will be asked to guide a character through caring for a plant and unpacking boxes [Fig. 9]. Interaction and player requirements will be limited, in order to preserve the conceptual and sentimental attachment of the audience. The player will be immersed in history and background for the protagonists, like any film, with the exception that the journey is independently paced. Each viewer will have a varying playthrough. While the items and descriptions will not vary, each interacting audience member will become the player character and live through their own conceptual unpacking of baggage. The game is intended to act as a solitude reflection of past, present, and future.



Figure 9

The rest of the gallery space will display concept art and physical elements used in creating the game. As the viewer walks around and views each room with its own embellishments, time can be taken to closely inspect individual aspects of each prop and item. Literal and figurative thumbprints will be visible, portraying a sense of aesthetic honesty that is often lost in the field of animation. The detachment of process and product will be merged with a display of sets inside the PlySpace Gallery. [Figs. 16, 18, 20]



In the time it takes a viewer to slowly absorb the physical rooms and sets, they can also complete the game. In the combination of physical artifacts and digital finished product, the culmination of this Creative Project comes to fruition: without one, the other cannot exist. There is no concept without physical exertion, and without tangible results there can be no content. There is a balance between physicality and emotional resonance, process and product, high and low art. This is the philosophy of the effort that went into the creation of the game and intended to be taken from it: through physical and mental exertion, balance can be achieved and fully understood. Just as the game's protagonist, Elaine [Fig. 14], overcomes her depression through physically unpacking boxes, she also grows through caring for a plant, a more existential endeavor. Like overcoming any problem and growing emotionally, one must act both externally and internally.



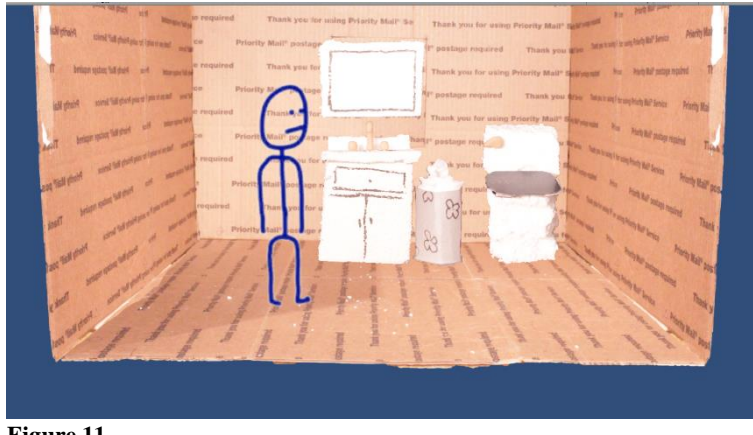
Figure 10

We not only use conceptual elements, but also engage in textural interest as a vehicle for cathartic involvement. While in traditional art, an audience member is typically invited to simply view a work, in video games one can take an active involvement with the development of narrative. This is a critical component to video games; if there is no player, there is no game. Not only are we involving a viewer in the progression of narrative by immersion, video games allow for empathetic experiences through one-on-one interaction. The player can make their own choices, choosing their own journey. While within the game world, the player will be entrenched in a world created by hand-made objects. However, when viewing these spaces digitally, there is

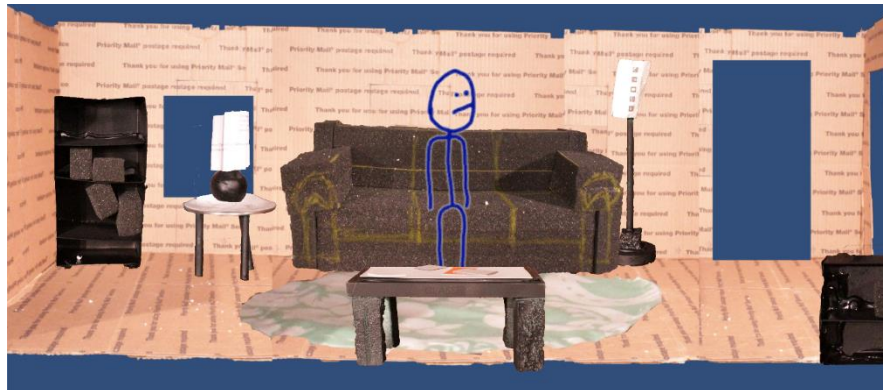


a disconnected response that is formed using stop-motion animation in a video game format. The physicality of the video game objects are locked behind a digital viewport of buttons and controls. This duality of form and function is the exact paradigm I am interested in highlighting. These objects are obviously handmade but retain a digital glare, or vice versa.

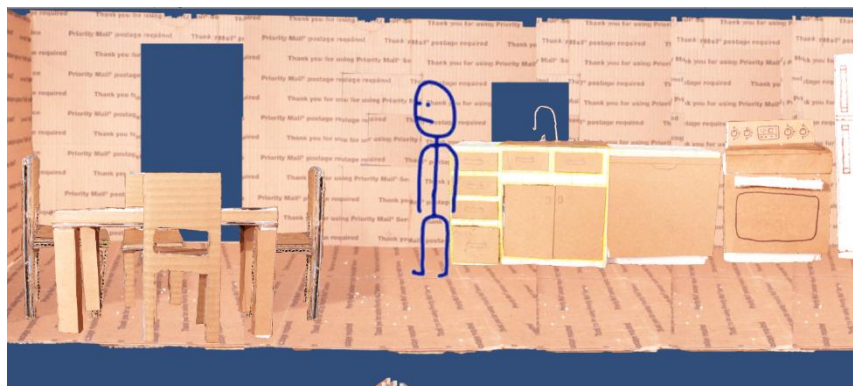
In this blend of physical work with digital presentation, there is a welcoming but disillusioning with technology that exists as dissonance of tradition and technology. Just as the arrival of photography ushered in the age of questioning technology, so do video games question the vehicle of art.



**Figure 11**



**Figure 12**



**Figure 13**

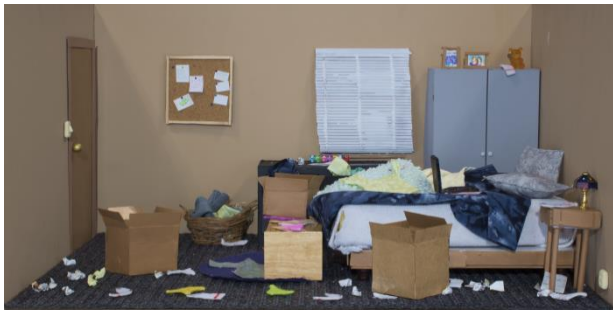


Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16

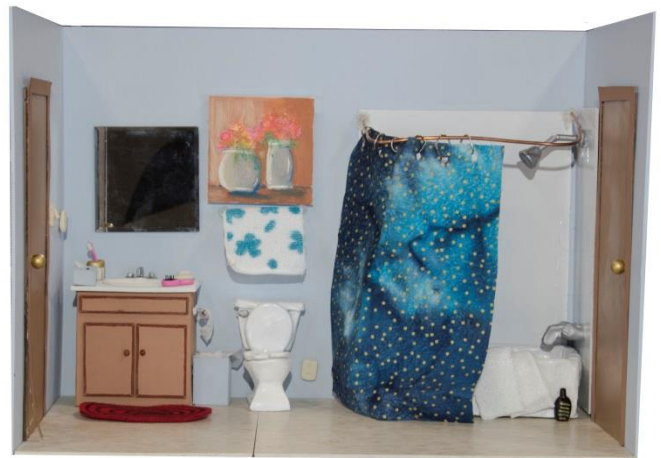


Figure 17



Figure 18

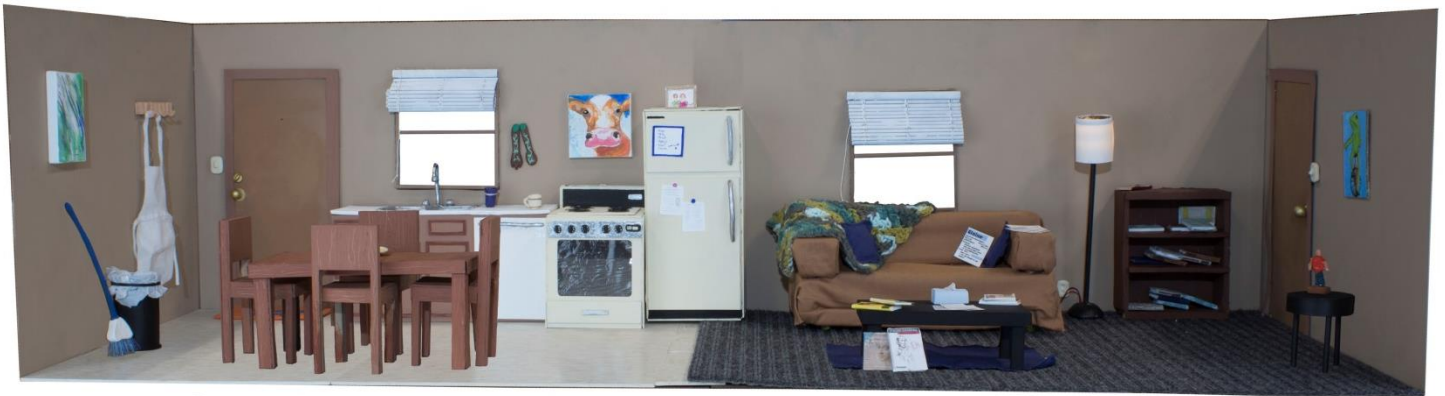


Figure 19

## Conclusion

While the process of learning to create a video game has been daunting, and at times seemingly impossible, the idea of creating interactive art was always a substantial motivator. That is the key component that really separates video games from art in the first place; intentional interactivity. In any work of art, the viewer is always considered, but not so much as with video games. With this work, the viewer is at the forefront of what is developed.

*Transplanted* may be taken several ways, depending on the person playing the video game. Some may take inspiration from the game to push forward with a new project, others may feel motivated to clean their homes, and some may feel compelled to update their own resumes. The game itself is intended to act as a springboard for action and motivation through placing oneself in another situation. The character's own baggage may not be perfectly relevant to the player, but the idea of attachment and connection is clear. The game is intended to be representative; the character experiences catharsis, while the player can create their own narrative within the bounds of the story. The game is intended to act as a meditative space in order to express experience outside of the digital world.

Through use of stop-motion animation, the game can push outside the bounds traditional video games and nestle itself within the confines of artist interactive experience. Physicality and emotional experience collide in an encounter that merge both form and function in a way that is inherent in stop-motion, while the interactivity of video games pushes that experience to new boundaries. Just as Duchamp and Klein questioned the range of form that art could exist within, so does this project ask the question of the difference between art and video games.

## **Exhibition Statement**

*Transplanted 2019*

Ben Fulcher and Emily Thornton

Stop-Motion Video Game, Unity Game Engine

This video game is created using stop motion animation and the Unity game engine. The objective is to take care of a recently received plant which motivates the main character to finish unpacking boxes from when she moved into her apartment. The game play mechanics are simple, allowing for ease of play. The goal is not just about unpacking boxes and cleaning a home; through taking care of a plant, Elaine, the protagonist, begins to take care of herself, transforming from lethargic depression to sentimental optimism.

Elaine cleans four rooms in her home: her bedroom, bathroom, living room, and kitchen, mirroring the four primary stages of personal change. Each room acts as a glimpse into this character is and where she has come. The game plays as a quick, meditative passage through a character's personal landscape. As each player slowly begins unpacking Elaine's personal belongings, they are invited into the sentimental values of often innocuous items. The game is a meditation on personal motivation, and overcoming seemingly monumental tasks, one step at a time.

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